

## Letter and enclosures from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, October 1, 1884, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. L Brevoort House, New York, October 1st, 1884. Preserve the enclosed letters as I have no other copy. AGB My darling May:

Don't think very badly of your poor husband for his delay in writing. I have again and again intended to write full accounts of the Telephone Trial but I have been so perplexed and worried about my appointment on a Committee of the National Academy whose report is due to-day (1) that I have had no time for the consideration of any other subject than what my course of action should be. The National Academy is by its charter, compelled to report to the Government on any questions referred to it by any of the Departments, and no member of the National Academy has the right to decline to serve on a Committee of investigation when requested to do so by the President and still continue to be a member. That is, at least, the way in which most members regard the matter.

The Senate and House of Representatives each appointed a Committee to consider the present organization of the Signal Service, Geological Survey, Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the Hydrographic office of the Navy Department and this Joint Commission appointed by Congress requested the appointment of a Committee of the National Academy to assist them in their deliberations.

This was done and the Committee held several meetings and agreed upon a Report. Then Secretary Chandler wrote to Prof. Newcomb (who was a member of the Committee) suggesting that a 2 Naval Officer should not serve on a committee which sat in judgment (so to speak) on the Department to which he belonged. That is — that an Inferior Officer should not criticise the acts of his Superior Officer — and Prof. Newcomb at once resigned from the Committee.

## Library of Congress

Prof. Marsh, the President, then appointed me in place of Prof. Newcomb.

The Secretary of the Navy then communicated with the Secretary of War who followed suit — and the members of the Committee belonging to the Army have resigned also.

I do not know what course Prof. Marsh has pursued in order to fill their places but I have been placed in a very trying position.

I have been studying the questions submitted to the Academy, and have examined the proposed Report of the Committee — which fully meets my approval. I cannot however bring myself to sign it — and I have to-day written to President Marsh declining to do so (!) — and now await the result.

I have not been able to consult with any other member of the Committee excepting Gen. Meigs the chairman (who was requested by the Secretary of War to resign — but has not done so — at least, so I understand). I telegraphed to your father for his advise — but he replied that he could not advise me without knowing more of the facts. I have therefore been obliged to act entirely on my own judgment — and hope I have done right. The only man I have been able to consult respecting this is Judge Bradley (one of the directors of the Telephone Co. — father of our Mr. Bradley) and he endorses my action so I am somewhat comforted. I enclose copies of my letters to Gen. Meigs 3 (Chairman of the Com.) and to President Marsh.

What do you say my little wife. Have I done right or wrong? The Report of the Committee, in order to have weight, should be unanimous. If it is not signed by the full Committee Congress will not be so ready to adopt the recommendations.

I await, with some trepidation, Prof. Marsh's response to my communication. Send me a word of comfort my darling — for I am greatly disturbed as to what the result may be. I feel, however, that my own conscience acquits me. The temptation to sign such a magnificent report is great — especially as I fully agree with it — but it is surely wrong for

## Library of Congress

a man to do an action that does not seem to his conscience to be perfectly honourable.  
Telegraph me my dear — what you think of the matter.

Your troubled husband, Alec.

Copy of a letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to Gen. Meigs. (Copy) Brevoort House, New York, October 1st, 1884. Gen. Meigs, Washington, D. C. My dear Sir:

Many thanks for your note in response to my telegram, and for your courtesy in forwarding a copy of that portion of the Report which referred to the Meteorological work of the Signal Office.

A military organization is, in my opinion, calculated to promote the efficiency of the service, and I feared that your suggestion relating to the transference of the Weather Bureau to the Post Office Department might have found its way into the Report of the Com.

The extract you have been kind enough to send me however has relieved my mind on this point and I have written to Prof. Marsh heartily endorsing the Report although I feel I cannot honourably append my signature to it. I beg to enclose a copy of my note to Prof. Marsh from which you will understand the position I take.

Yours very respectfully, (signed) Alexander Graham Bell.

Copy of a letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to Prof. Marsh. (Copy) Brevoort House, New York, October 1st, 1884. Prof. O. C. Marsh, Pres. National Academy of Science, Newhaven, Conn. My dear Sir:

Immediately upon receipt of your telegram notifying me of my appointment on a Committee of the National Academy and requesting a reply, I telegraphed that I would consider it my duty as a member of the National Academy to serve on any Committee on which you believed my services would be of value.

## Library of Congress

I did not at that time know the nature of the questions that had been referred to the Academy nor was I aware of the fact that the Committee had already held its final meeting and had substantially agreed upon a report.

I am free to say that I fully and heartily concur in the Report that has been forwarded to you by Gen. Meigs, and consider it an honour to be requested to sign a document containing such valuable and important recommendations.

I cannot however consent to sign the Report, for I have not participated in the deliberations of the Committee and my signature under such circumstances would hardly, I think, be consistent with honour.

Yours very respectfully, (signed) Alexander Graham Bell.